



Editorial: Make room for new businesses to develop

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Western Michigan University has an economic jewel in its Business Technology and Research Park located just southeast of the intersection of Parkview Avenue and Drake Road.

When it was established in 1999, the business-and-research park was a controversial development for some residents, who preferred that area's farm fields over economic enterprise.

Now, a decade later, especially in view of what has happened to the Michigan economy during that time, we realize how fortunate it was that key local leaders and university officials pursued their goal, despite opposition, and got the park built.

Consider the fact that:

- If the park did not exist, there would be roughly 1,400 fewer direct and indirect jobs in the Kalamazoo area, amounting to about \$50 million less in direct and indirect salaries.
- The businesses in the park contribute more than \$811,000 a year to the community in taxes.
- The park is home to the Southwest Michigan Innovation Center, a life-sciences incubator that helps start new businesses and retain pharmaceutical and research talent that otherwise would have left here.

There are many other reasons the business-and-research park has been a boon to the community, but now's not the time to look back.

The university is nearing capacity at the current site.

It's time to talk about an expansion plan.

In February, Robert G. Miller, WMU associate vice president for community outreach, addressed a neighborhood association to allay residents' concerns about future development in that area. Miller reaffirmed the university's commitment to the preservation of the Asylum Lake area, which will remain for passive recreation. That's great.

The property that could be considered for expansion is the 54-acre Colony Farm parcel across from the Asylum Lake property, on the west side of Drake Road. Miller said there are no plans to develop that property.

But if there aren't any plans to expand on that site, there should be.

In the past 10 years, the business-and-research park has proven itself. There should be no doubt about the value -- or the need -- to expand its capacity.

The Colony Farm property, which also runs along U.S. 131, would provide extensive visibility for WMU from the highway. It wasn't until the engineering campus was located to the south of this parcel that the university achieved that kind of physical visibility.

We'd like to see that visibility grow -- along with a statewide awareness of WMU as a key contributor to the life sciences field that is so important to our future.

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